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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine the development of vocational aspirations in the years three to six. Ss totaled 282 black and white three- four-, and five-year-olds, 143 males and 139 females. Vocational aspirations questions were individually administered as part of an assessment inventory. Responses were arranged into six categories--all adult (specific occupation, adult, parent), older child, same child, fantasy, nonhuman, and other. Age-related findings show that the all adult category increases significantly with age and that, within the all adult category, specific occupational aspirations increase markedly. During the preschool years, the child comes to project himself into his adult future. Sex-related findings show that, although boys and girls equally frequently give responses classified as all adult, the pattern of their vocational projection is different: (1) boys are more likely to project in terms of an adult role in general, while girls are more likely to project in terms of the specific role of parent; (2) although boys and girls mentioned specific occupations with equal frequency, boys perceived the range of occupations open to them to be wider than did girls; girls' choices clustered around the occupations of nurse and teacher; and (3) girls appeared to be more reality-bound than boys. Race-related findings suggest that black children are less likely to project themselves into adult statuses and their conceptualization of adult role less frequently involves occupational specificity. (KM)

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WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE WHEN YOU GROW UP?
VOCATIONAL CHOICE IN CHILDREN AGED THREE TO SIX[1]

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Over the past two decades theorists in occupational psychology have placed increasing emphasis on the importance of regarding vocational behavior as a developmental process (Ginzberg, Ginsberg, Axelrad & Herma, 1951; Havighurst, 1964). But the view that vocational development encompasses the entire life span and entails progression through identifiable stages has been accompanied by scant research on vocational behavior in the preschool years.

This study represents an initial effort to chart the course of expressed vocational aspirations in the years three to six.

Method

Subjects

Our Ss were 287 children in day care centers in Pennsylvania. These centers were located in five geographical regions representing variations in state population density. Within the day care centers, Ss were randomly

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selected to provide a sample stratified by age, sex, and race. There were 143 males and 139 females; 66 3-year-olds, 142 4-year-olds, and 74 5-year-olds. The numerical imbalance in age groups probably reflects enrollment patterns. There were 184 whites and 98 blacks; in analyses involving race, however, only urban children (73 white, 86 black) are utilized because of the small number of nonurban blacks and hence the possible confounding of race and locale variables.

Procedure

The vocational aspirations question was individually administered as part of a 45-minute assessment inventory (Kirchner & Vondracek, 1972). Examiners were experienced psychometricians, five white and two black, three male and four female. A racial mix existed in 22% of the child-psychometrist dyads.

The vocational aspirations question begins as follows:

> A (boy, girl) can be all sorts of things when (s)he grows up. What would you like to be when you grow up?

Contingent upon a child's response, reinforcement for the child's responding is given and additional responses are sought:

> That's very interesting. Maybe you've thought of some other things you could be when you grow up. What else could you be when you grow up?

Response Measures

Results were analyzed in terms of number of aspirations mentioned and category of response. Six categories of response were developed (on which intercoder agreement was 95%). These categories are the following:

1. All Adult: a category composed of the following three subcategories which define its scope:
   a) Specific Occupation
   b) Adult: nonoccupational adult status, e.g., "be a man"
   c) Parent
2. Older Child: attributes of older, bigger children, e.g. "be a Girl Scout," "be taller."
3. Same Child: responses indicative of lack of projection into more mature roles, e.g., "Be a boy just like I am."
4. Fantasy: fictitious characters or roles no longer extant to any significant degree in contemporary society, e.g., Batman, princess, cowboy.
5. Nonhuman: animal and inanimate objects, e.g., Doggie, tiger, and "a bath tub, so I could drink lots of water."
6. Other: responses not classifiable into the preceding categories and not sufficiently frequent to warrant additional categories.

Findings and Discussion

The two major findings of this study are:

1. Aspects of vocational development follow an orderly pattern in early childhood. During the preschool years the child comes to project himself into his adult future, to see himself as one day an adult.

2. Even in the preschool years, significant sex and race differences are evident in vocational behavior.

Eighty-eight percent of the children gave scorable replies (those other than don't know, no reply, etc.) to the question. Ability to give a scorable response was not related to the child's age, sex or race. A mean of 2.0 responses were given (SD = .83); number of responses was not related to age, sex or race.

Table 1 shows the distribution of responses among the six response categories for the total sample. It can be seen that the largest percentage of children gave responses categorized as All Adult, and that within that category, the mention of a specific occupation was most frequent.

Age-related findings are summarized in Table 2. It can be seen that the All Adult category increases significantly with age and that within the All Adult category, specific occupational aspirations increase markedly. There are decreases in Toolsman, Older Child and Same Child responses.

These findings suggest that a major aspect of vocational development in early childhood is projection into one's future role as an adult, specifically an adult identified occupationally. The child in this period is seen as coming to conceptualize himself as one day achieving adult status and to conceptualize adults as having a particular role characteristic, engagement in an occupation.

These findings support contentions that the young child's developing cognitive process enable him to think of himself in a propositional manner--to consider not simply who he is now but who he might become. They are also consistent with Erikson's (1963) view that early childhood is a period during which the child explores what type of person he might

wish to be in the future.

The age related findings, however, are most relevant to Havighurst's' (1964) scheme. His first stage of vocational development begins at year 5, the age of our oldest Ss, and extends through year 10. During this stage, called "Identification with a worker," the child's primary task is to identify with significant adults and to integrate the concept of work into his ego ideal. Our results suggest an important precursor of this stage: mastery of the task of projecting oneself into the future and conceiving of oneself as one day achieving adult status. Once this task has been mastered, the child may begin the process of identification with significant adult workers.

Sex comparisons are summarized in Table 3. It can be seen that boys and girls equally frequently give responses classified as All Adult; they do not appear to differ in ability to project themselves into the vocational future. The pattern of this vocational projection, however, differs for boys and girls; boys are more likely to project in terms of an adult role in general and girls are more likely to project in terms of the specific role of parent.

Boys and girls mentioned specific occupations with equal frequency. We were interested in analyzing the Specific Occupation data further, however, inasmuch as previous research with older children (Looft, 1971a; 1971b) suggests that girls learn early that certain adult statuses are not open to them and that boys generally perceive a wider range of available occupational alternatives. A foreclosure of occupational options has been postulated to occur earlier for females than for males.

The next two slides show the specific occupations mentioned by boys (Figure 1) and by girls (Figure 2). These plots show vividly how the range of available occupations appear wider to boys; their choices are more evenly distributed, more "scattered." The plot for the girls' choices shows clustering toward two occupations, nurse and teacher, which are the most common choices of older girls. Comparison of the two plots offers support for the notion of earlier foreclosure for girls, "earlier" in this case being the preschool years!

It has also been suggested that girls are more reality bound than boys. Our findings of more frequent Older Child responses by girls and more frequent Fantasy responses by boys support this notion. Girls are more likely to think in terms of being a girl scout or going to high school; boys are more likely to think in terms of being Batman or Santa Claus. Here again, whether nature or nurture is at the root of these differences, the boys' range of perceived possibilities seems less restrained.

It is noted that Figures 1 and 2 show instances of children, particularly girls, naming occupations traditionally associated with the opposite sex (e.g., a girl choosing fireman, a boy choosing nurse). Further research might explore whether these instances represent a liberalization in the availability of occupations or merely indicate that these children have not yet learned prevailing sex role occupational stereotypes.

Racial comparisons are summarized in Table 4. Blacks tended to give fewer responses than whites in the All Adult category. Within this category, blacks gave fewer Specific Occupation responses and more Adult responses. Blacks also gave more responses in the Same Child and Older

Child categories. These findings suggest that the black children are less mature in their vocational development from the standpoint of mastery of the task of projection into the vocational future. They are less likely to project themselves into Adult statuses and their conceptualization of adult role less frequently involves occupational specificity. These racial differences are not related to paternal employment nor presence in the home, as there were no race related differences in these variables in our sample. These findings are congruent with findings of racial disparity in vocational planning in older children (Ansell & Hansen, 1971). They are also consistent with indications that black adolescents in contrast to whites see their occupational future as virtually predetermined and as involving limited, and primarily undesirable, possibilities (Hauser, 1971). Further, blacks more frequently are admonished to avoid growing up to be like specified adults in their social sphere. It is suggested that the transmission of a sense of vocational predeterminism together with an emphasis upon models and aspects of adulthood to be avoided can serve to inhibit young black children's vocational projections as early as the preschool years.

In conclusion, the preschool period can be seen as a bona fide stage of vocational development; during these years the child comes to conceptualize himself as one day being an adult and having an occupation. Moreover, it is an important stage of vocational development during which population subgroup differences are already apparent. The sex and race differences found in these early years suggest that efforts toward achieving equality of vocational opportunity should not neglect the very young.

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Table 1

Occupational Aspiration Responses of the Total Sample

Response category	Percent of children expressing aspiration[a]
All adult	69.1
Specific occupation	57.0
Adult	11.2
Parent	17.9
Older child	17.7
Same child	10.0
Fantasy	10.0
Nonhuman	20.1
Other	12.0

[a] N = 249

Table 7

Occupational Aspirations: Age Comparisons

	Percent of children expressing aspiration			
Response category	Age 3 yr.[a]	Age 4 yr.[b]	Age 5 yr.[c]	χ^2 probability
All adult	57.4	65.9	84.1	.004
Spec. occ.	42.6	53.6	78.3	.0001
Adult	11.1	13.5	7.2	.41
Parent	14.8	19.0	15.9	.74
Older child	24.1	19.8	8.7	.06
Same child	14.8	11.1	4.3	.14
Fantasy	13.0	8.7	10.1	.69
Nonhuman	33.3	20.6	8.7	.003

[a] n = 54
[b] n = 126
[c] n = 69

Table 3

Occupational Aspirations: Sex Comparisons

Response category	Percent of children expressing aspirations: Males[a]	Females[b]	χ^2 probability
All adult	72.5	65.3	.27
Spec. occ.	58.8	55.1	.63
Adult	15.3	6.8	.05
Parent	6.1	29.7	.0001
Older child	12.2	23.7	.03
Same child	9.2	11.0	.78
Fantasy	13.7	5.9	.07
Nonhuman	19.1	21.2	.80

[a] n = 131
[b] n = 118

Table 4

Occupational Aspirations: Race Comparisons

Response category	Percent of children expressing aspirations: Black urban[a]	White urban[b]	χ^2 probability
All adult	65.8	81.2	.06
Spec. occ.	41.9	71.0	.03
Adult	19.0	4.3	.01
Parent	15.2	20.3	.55
Older child	22.8	8.7	.04
Same child	16.5	4.3	.04
Fantasy	11.4	8.7	.78
Nonhuman	8.9	18.8	.13

[a] n = 79
[b] n = 69

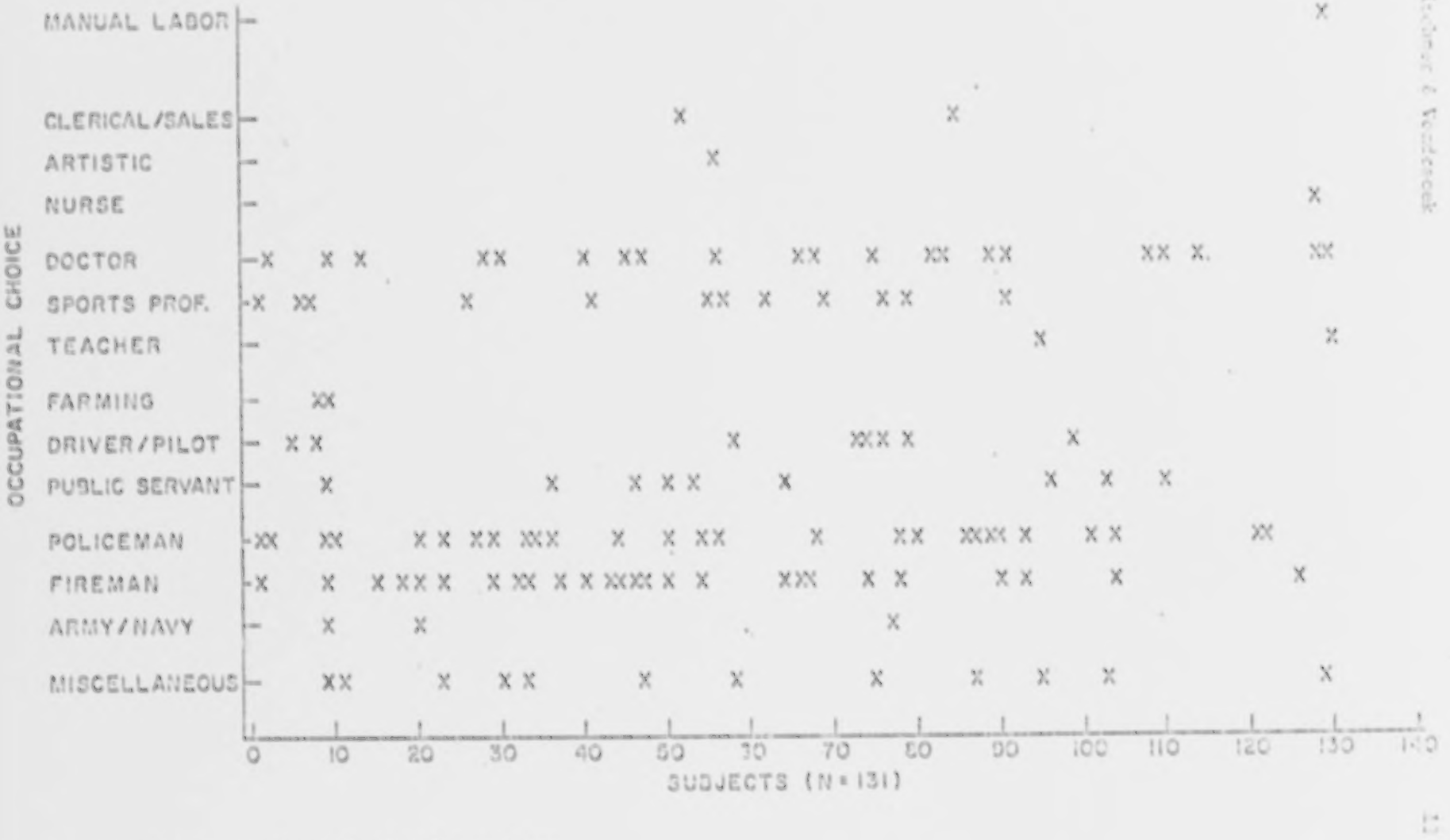

Figure 1. Occupational Aspirations: Boys

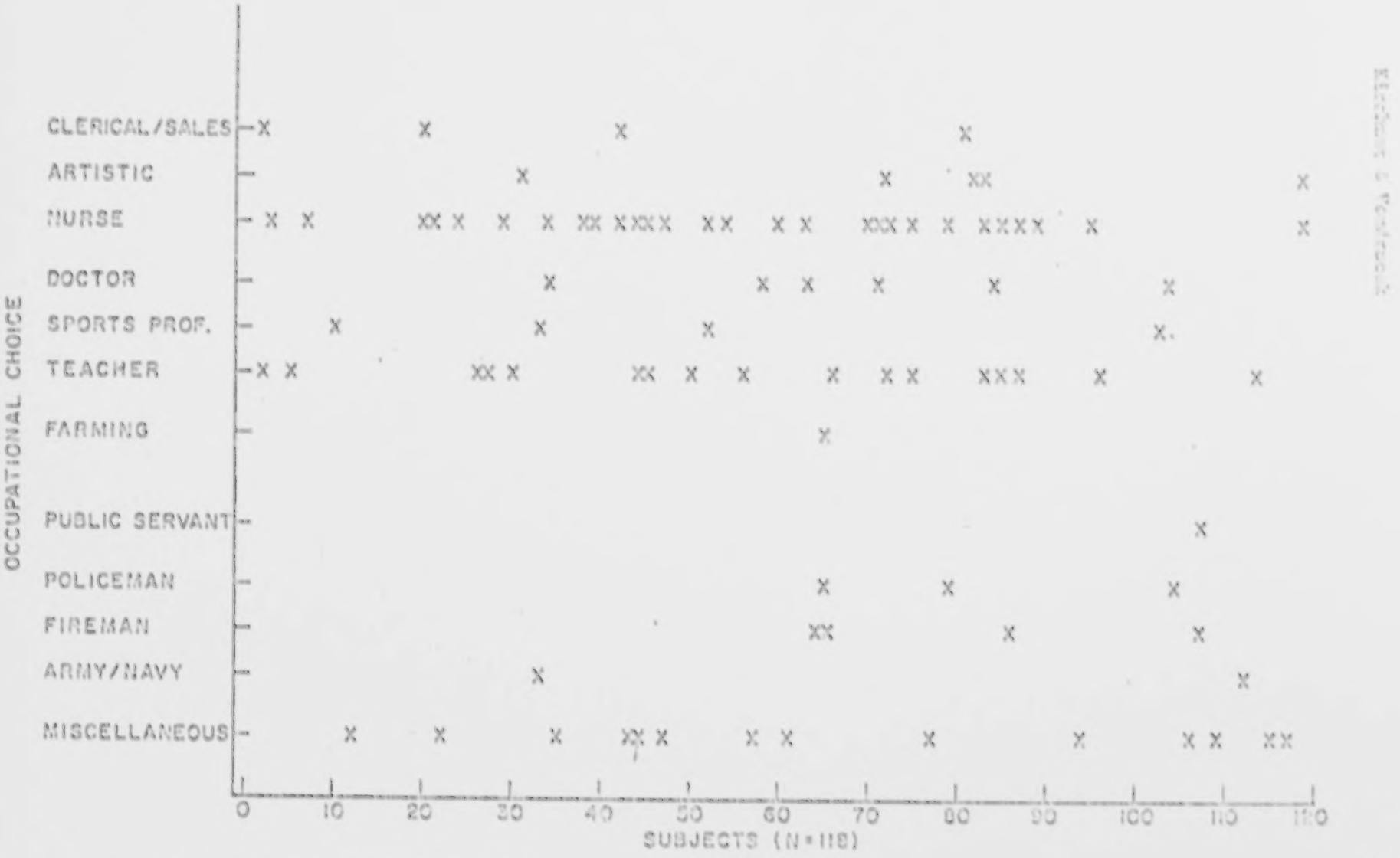

Figure 2. Occupational Aspirations: Girls